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Subject: Pittsburgh Post-Gazette Editorial: Testing needed: EPA's intervention may answer Dimock questions

Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

Editorial: Testing needed: EPA's intervention may answer Dimock questions

Tuesday, January 24, 2012

At its best, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's decision to test well water supplies in a Susquehanna County town is merely insurance that the supplies are safe. At its worst, the federal agency's action could be an indictment of Pennsylvania's Department of Environmental Protection.

Which proves true remains to be seen. Samples will be taken at 60 homes in Dimock over the next three weeks and analysis will be conducted over a five-week period.

The reason for the testing is methane that was found in the drinking water supplies, which the DEP in 2008 said was the result of faulty construction of hydraulic fracturing drilling wells in the area by Cabot Oil & Gas Corp. The driller denies causing the problems, but DEP cited and fined Cabot and the company had been filling residents' 550-gallon water tanks as part of a 2010 consent agreement.

In November, though, the company stopped providing the water, and the DEP determined Cabot had met its obligations. Residents who don't agree asked the EPA to intervene, and the agency decided the information they provided warranted further review.

The residents' fears must be addressed, and EPA testing is the best way to accomplish that goal. Although the DEP says it has found no evidence to justify the EPA's actions, it nonetheless is not objecting to the additional testing. If its own findings are not confirmed, though, the state department's reputation will suffer.

Access to clean drinking water is a basic human need, and the residents of Dimock can't be expected to sleep soundly at night until they know whether their supplies are safe.

First published on January 24, 2012 at 12:00 am

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